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The National News Council's News Clippings, 1975 November

The National News Council, Inc.

The Capital Times
Nov 11, 1975

Hello Wisconsin

By MILES McMILLIN

TO RACINE MONDAY with Executive Editor Elliott Maraniss to sit in on the deliberations of the National News Council meeting at Wingspread, the fabulous Frank Lloyd Wright house built in 1938 for the H. F. Johnson family and now operated by the Johnson Foundation as a conference center. Neither Elliott nor I have been very enthusiastic about the NNC, which was established to monitor the news media, to hear complaints and examine allegations of inaccuracy, and to probe possible infringements on freedom of the press. But we both have been curious about its operation, particularly in respect to how it would handle the volatile complaint about CBS's "Guns of Autumn" program. The conference in Wingspread also provides an opportunity to visit again with a member of the Council and old friend, Irving Dilliard, former editor of the editorial

(Continued on Page 3, Col. 1)

page of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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WE GET AN early start to get us to Wingspread in time for the morning session at 10 o'clock. There is little time for any back-roading, except here in Dane County. Most of the trip, however, is on I-90 to the cut-off to I-94 and then over to Racine. It is obvious as we drive into Wingspread that the place is more beautiful than ever, nestled in the rolling prairie north of Racine. Inside we are greeted by the gracious hostess of Wingspread and the vice president of the Foundation, Rita Goodman. Standing in front of the crackling fireplace is Austin Wehrwein, an old Madison friend and now editorial writer for the Minneapolis Star, who is the proud possessor of the coveted Pulitzer award. With him is Vern Hoffman of the Racine Journal-Times, who now does part-time work for the Foundation.

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WE CHAT WITH them and make the acquaintance of Bill Branstad, the Omsbudsman for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, who is a friend of Clarence Olson, former Capital Times photographer before he went to the Post-Dispatch with his lovely bride, Ariel, the daughter of one of Wisconsin's most famous authors, Sterling North.

* * *

Hello Wisconsin

(Continued from Page 1)

IT IS OBVIOUS why Wingspread is known across the country as an ideal conference spot. Complete agendas for all activities are supplied, the names and affiliations of all the conference participants and the working press are provided, a setup for handling travel arrangements is handy, the staff is friendly and incredibly helpful and the food is simple and delicious. I have never left Wingspread with anything but fond memories.

* * *

THE OPENING gets underway with Stanley H. Fuld, NNC chairman presiding. He is the former Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, which corresponds to our Supreme Court. Flanking him are Executive Director William B. Arthur, former editor of Look magazine, Ned Schnurman, associate director and Sally Stevens, counsel.

* * *

IT IS SOON apparent why the Council has aroused the indifference of so many working newspeople. It is too much under the influence of the lawyers. Its hands are tied in respect to considering such lively controversies as "The Guns of Autumn" program. It has a by-law prohibiting the consideration of any case which is before the courts or administration agencies for consideration. The controversial CBS broadcast on hunting is on the no-no list because some hunting group in Michigan has started a preposterous libel action for $30 million dollars.

FORTUNATELY THE Council is taking steps to change the by-laws to give it freedom to do the job it was established to do. I chatted with several of the members and some of the staff who now realize that to allow the lawyers to have too much influence on an organization such as this is to castrate the organization. The lawyers have long sought to convince newspapers that they should not discuss cases that are before public courts on the pretext that this denies a fair trial to the defendants. Allowing the lawyers to establish this kind of rule, of course, puts more power into their hands, and takes the administration of justice behind closed doors. There is an ironic twist to the fact that all too many newspaper people don't see the incongruity in the lawyers demanding less freedom to operate on the part of the newspapers, while they take more freedom to operate by going behind closed doors in plea bargaining cases.

OTHER CASES considered by the NNC during the day were the Clark vs. CBS case involving a complaint of a Kentucky woman who charges that CBS was unfair in presenting news about the anti-busing demonstrations in Louisville, and the Barrett vs. the Chicago Sun-Times case in which a Pennsylvania doctor charges that the Sun Times syndicate presented an overly sympathetic view of chiropractic in a series written by its medical reporter.

* * *

IN ADDITION to the Grievance Committee, the Freedom of the Press Committee convened under the chairmanship of Irv Dilliard and devoted most of its deliberations to a discussion of the paper presented by Dilliard concerning the growth of monopoly in the newspaper field and proposing a program for continuing studies. The Committee voted to recommend to the full Council that the monopoly study be launched. It also adopted a proposal by Merlyn Pitzele, the Council's economic advisor, who has many friends here in Madison from the days when he was preparing himself at the University for a distinguished career in economics and journalism. The Pitzele proposal is to study the impact of organized labor on the growth of monopoly in the newspaper industry. The Committee also took up providing greater reader access to columns in the newspaper, how to improve White House press conferences, the problem of "press overkill" — a term used for too much attention being paid to such people as Lynette Fromme and Patty Hearst. The Committee also showed interest in looking into the refusal of CIA Director Colby to say in public whether news service reporters were on the payroll of the CIA. Some other subjects were considered as well.

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ALTOGETHER IT WAS a stimulating and productive day.

Globe's Mansion House Stories Misleading, News Council Says

RACINE, Wis., Nov. 12 (AP) — The National News Council says it believes that a complaint against the St. Louis Globe-Democrat dealing with stories on the Mansion House project was warranted.

The unofficial review panel is composed of representatives of news media and persons from without the industry.

The Globe-Democrat carried more than 50 articles concerning the administration of Mansion House, an apartment complex on the St. Louis riverfront.

The complaint was made by Maurice Frank, general manager of Mansion House. The council called the series misleading, citing what it called statements made out of context and lack of attribution.

(The managing editor of the Globe-Democrat today referred all inquiries to G. Duncan Bauman, the newspaper's publisher. Bauman was unavailable for comment.)

The council expressed positions in favor of the Chicago Sun-Times, the New York Times and the Columbia Broadcasting System.

In the Sun-Times case, Dr. Stephen Barrett, chairman of a Lehigh, Pa., committee against medical fraud, complained about a story on chiropractic.

The council concluded thatthe complaint involved an area of medicine about which there was continuing controversy, saying that the complainant tok took with statements that were not those of the writer but of persons who were interviewed.

In the New York Times matter, the council held that a television crit ic has the same right to expression on the arts as do editorial writers expressing themselves on government, international relations and fiscal affairs.

The council said it could not support a complaint against CBS, accused of unfair treatment of persons opposing court-mandated school busing in Louisville, Ky.

The council held that CBS could not be expected to cover all aspects on a single newscast.

First Amendment rights gradually filched

Until recently, none of us worried too much about our privacy. It was about as American as apple pie.

No Big Brother here, we assured ourselves as we turned the pages of Orwell's "1984."

But Watergate and the wave of investigations and confessions which followed made it very clear our individual privacy was in jeopardy. We were suddenly bombarded with stories of government bugging, spying, record keeping and prying.

Like a turtle being poked at, we withdrew into our shells and whimpered about our right of privacy.

In response, legislators pushed for, and got, laws spelling out citizens' privacy rights in many states and at the federal level.

But, as a side effect, government agencies are

Editor's note: After a two-day meeting of the National News Council at Wingspread Conference Center this week, some members agreed to stay over a day and talk with journalism students and faculty from five Midwest universities about current issues involving the news media. Three of these discussions, led by either National News Council members or invited speakers, are focused on here as controversial areas affecting the public as well as the news media.

By Loren Ghiglione
Southbridge Evening News

"I seem to be spending more and more of my time in our lawyer's office, trying to figure out ways to help our reporters extract information from unwilling sources, most of them c[illegible]

now using privacy laws as an excuse to withhold information to the press.

The obstacle these laws are presenting to reporters is no small one and very much on the minds of news media officials.

Loren Ghiglione, editor and publisher of the Southbridge, Mass. Evening News told journalism students the 1974 federal Privacy Act which went into effect last month restricts access to about 800 kinds of files kept by the federal government.

He added the proposed Fair Credit Reporting Act "would extend the privacy act to cover records of all kinds of government-state and municipal as well as federal . . ."

Some of the fun in running a newspaper is being sapped away by laws which make it difficult, at times impossible, to gather news to inform the public, he said.

"I seem to be spending more and more of my time in our lawyer's office, trying to figure out ways to help our reporters extract information from unwilling sources, most of them clearly public sources," he said.

This is happening, he said, because of a gradual "filching of the newspapers First Amendment rights."

The First Amendment forbids any law abridging the freedom of the press.

Ghiglione told the students he did not believe just because something was true it should necessarily be published. But, he said, newspapers take seriously the responsibility of deciding what the public has a right to know and usually end up making the right decision.

Privacy laws are not the only stones in the shoe of the reporter running around town gathering information for a story, Ghiglione indicated.

The problem of secrecy in government has been around as long as there has been government.

The federal Freedom of Information Act and state open meeting laws have helped reporters get their foot in formerly closed doors — but not enough to satisfy the media.

Ghiglione said the privacy laws could conflict with the Freedom of Information Act to the extent that by releasing some data, an official could be complying with one law while violating another.

By Julianne Corty
Journal Times Staff

Another grey area editors are becoming increasingly wary of is libel.

Beginning in 1964 with the landmark case of New York Times v. Sullivan, the Supreme Court handed down a series of decisions broadly interpreting the First Amendment by making the press almost immune from libel suits brought by public official or public figures.

However, in 1974, the high court took what most consider to be an about face and in a case involving a well-known Chicago attorney, retreated from such a broad definition of a public figure, making the press more vulnerable to costly libel suits.

This decision, Ghiglione said, had a chilling effect on news gathering.

"The major problem with the press in this country is the press is too timid in the first place. We ought to be very careful of laws which would make it more timid," he warned.

Equality hasn't reached writing about women

Have you ever noticed how women in news stories are often described as "the perky blonde", "the slender brunette" or the "trim redhead"?

And how rarely a man's physical attributes are mentioned?

Or did it cross your mind that interviews with women often include a paragraph on what the husband does but stories on men rarely mention the wife's vocation?

These are just some examples of what has led to a blurred image of women in the news media, according to Sylvia Roberts, a lawyer and member of the National News Council.

"The news media is charged with the responsibility of conveying facts," Roberts told the group of journalism students. "But when it comes to conveying facts about the image of women, we see through a glass darkly."

She explained the fault lies with reporters as well as editors and headline writers. The blurred image results from what is included in the stories

By Sylvia Roberts
National News Council

"The interviewer evidently feels a great sense of suspense until the marital status is established. This is not only a great time waster — but what

about women as well as what is left out, she said.

For instance, a woman's personal life and appearance seem to be more important than what she does — be it homemaker or lawyer, she indicated.

Reporters, she said, believe they must know if a woman is married and where she stands on women's liberation, regardless of the importance of these things to the story.

"The interviewer evidently feels a great sense of suspense until the marital status is established. This is not only a great time waster — but what relevance to the reader?"

She cited a story written about her by a woman reporter. The story concerned a speech Roberts made in a southern city.

The story came out with a headline "Female Lawyer Wears No Ring."

She said she pondered that headline a long time and could never decide what the headline writer had meant or what not wearing a wedding ring had to do with the story.

By stereotyping the women involved in the equal rights movement, the news media has driven a wedge between women which is almost impossible to recover from, she said.

"Women who looked for equality in the women's movement were immediately labeled libbers — a critical and ridiculing term."

She said this kind of treatment "misled the public into thinking that this important movement which affected over 50 per cent of the people is at odds with and would oppose women and men as they exist today."

The news focus on the bra burning and street demonstrations polarized women and reinforced the idea that "if you involved yourself with this group, you became a non-woman – you became something which as far as I'm concerned, only surgery can accomplish," Roberts said.

"Women are then convinced by the myths propagated by the media which says the equal rights movement would be a disaster for them."

Roberts, who was the lawyer in the first sex bias case ever to reach a federal court, said all the attention on the inconsequential but more sensational aspects of the movement — such as whether to call a woman Ms. or Mrs. — has distracted the public from the basic issue.

"If a woman wants to be Mrs. John Jones and never Betty Jones — that's fine. That's part of what we're fighting for — to let a woman do what she wants to do."

Reply—question of law or news judgement?

When the head of the Miami teachers union announced his candidacy for the Florida Legislature in 1972, the Miami Herald ran two editorials denouncing him as a law breaker, a czar and, pulling no punches, called him unsuitable for the post.

The union chief, Pat Tornillo, asked the newspaper for the right to reply to the editorials, as provided for in a Florida staute. The newspaper refused.

Two years later, the Supreme Court upheld the Herald's position and ruled the state statue unconstitutional.

In part, the decision stated, "The Florida statute fails to clear the barriers of the First Amendment because of its intrusion into the function of editors....."

By so ruling, the Supreme Court put a damper, at least temporarily, on what has come to be known "the access movement."

Benno Schmidt Jr., A Columbia law professor, has been watching that movement and has written about it in a book, "Freedom of the Press vs. Public Access."

At Wingspread, he explained the concept and history of access.

By Benno Schmidt, Jr.
Columbia University

"Will we give the broadcaster the freedom of the print media or will the print media be like the broadcaster and be subject to general ad[illegible]istrative

Access advocates say the government has an obligation to ensure a wide variety of views reach the public. To do this, they say, newspapers must be forced to offer a right of reply to persons with viewpoints contrary to those printed in the news columns or editorial pages.

This right of reply has been firmly established for radio and television through Federal Communications Commission regulations and a 1969 Supreme Court ruling.

The theory behind the regulations is that since broadcast frequencies are limited, government interference is necessary to see they are used in the public interest.

The press, however, has always been constitutionally immune from such forms of government interference.

Anyone, it is argued, can start a newspaper or write a pamphlet. But not many people have the money, know-how or license to operate a radio or television station.

According to Schmidt, the access movement focused on newspapers when it became apparent over the past decade that the diverse, open market place of ideas the press formerly constituted, was being changed by mass conglomeration and big business monopolies.

Two and three newspaper towns suddenly became one newspaper towns, controlled by one man or one company with one set of opinions.

Along with this economic trend, came the 1960's antiwar and civil rights demonstrations which, Schmidt said, were fed by a feeling of frustration at not having "access to means of expression."

The access advocates, said Schmidt, want newspapers to be treated like a public utility. This could, but doesn't necessarily, mean the licensing of newspapers much as broadcasters are licensed today.

In the Florida case, the Supreme Court came down hard in opposition to the access idea, as it pertains to newspapers.

This brings up the legal inconsistency of treating two kinds of news media differently, said Schmidt.

"How will this be resolved?" he asked.

"Will we give the broadcaster the freedom of the print media or will the print media be like the broadcaster and be subject to general administrative oversights?"

Schmidt said he believes governmentally enforced access to the newspapers would "hurt more than help," and may not be needed at all.

"I believe I perceive in the 1970's a new found interest (in newspapers) in being fair - in setting up procedural avenues to be fair. Access is opening up a little bit."

This is happening, he said, with more emphasis on letters to the editor, citizens commentaries and newspaper ombudsmen.

Reporters unprepared for presidential press conferences: study

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Reporters should prepare themselves more thoroughly for presidential press conferences by caucusing beforehand and "doing their homework," says a report for the National News Council.

The presidential press conference produces more "news" than insight, according to the report, released Sunday by Prof. Lewis W. Wolfson of American University.

Wolfson recommended that a President hold press conferences at least every two weeks and said reporters should prepare more thoroughly.

"If a President can spend hours studying and talking with experts in preparation for a press conference, correspondents should be doing their own homework and organizing," he said.

"They ought to caucus beforehand to discuss the important issues. . . . Outside experts might be brought in to school them and suggest questions."

The report credited President Ford with having revitalized the presidential press conference. Ford conducted an average of one every three weeks during his first year. He also has encouraged follow-up questions, the report said.

But "the press conference is one element in a package of White House media happenings that often absorb reporters at the expense of more thoughtful reporting," Wolfson warned.

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Graphic Communications Weekly
November 18, 1975

Times Taken to Task: In a report concerned with its first two years of activity, the National News Council (One Lincoln Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10023) singled out *The New York Times* for continuing opposition to the Council, and refusal to cooperate in its investigations. According to NNC chairman Stanley Fuld: "On occasion after occasion, the Times has responded negatively to Council requests for information to assist in answering public complaints against it. That's a newspaper's prerogative," Fuld added, "but the Time's refusal to sit down and discuss the Council's operations hardly befits a paper of such stature." The National News Council was founded "to serve the public interest in preserving freedom of communication and advancing accurate and fair reporting of news."

Whither newspapers?

11/19/75

By AUSTIN C. WEHRWEIN
Of the Editorial/Opinion

Judging Journalism

Next Saturday there will be a gathering of Twin Cities journalists at the University of Minnesota West Bank Auditorium to discuss, "Hard Times and the Newsroom."

The collective bullet-biting session, sponsored by the Twin Cities Journalism Review, represents, it seems to me, a growing awareness on the part of working journalists that regardless of past management methods we are all in the same boat.

The Twin City Journalism Review's purpose is to give reporters a chance to criticize editors and owners of the news media. There are still serious differences of opinion about where the boat, so to speak, is being steered. But now the problem is the leaking. How badly? Can it be saved? Who's going to be thrown overboard to increase economic buoyancy?

Because the print, as opposed to the broadcast, medium is on the rougher course, newspaper editors will be the main speakers Saturday.

Current inflation and recession exacerbate but do not alone explain the press's problems. Good times alone will not therefore bail us out.

Indeed, the competition from broadcasting is assumed to be the basic cause of the press's plight. The competition for advertising dollars may well be less crucial in the long run than the competition for attention. For "hearts and minds," if you'll indulge me.

Last week the National News Council (NNC), a counterpart of the Minnesota Press Council, got into the worry act. Unlike the Minnesota Council, the NNC not only judges controversies but sponsors research projects. Specificially, the NNC proposed at its meeting in Racine, Wis., to study the possible impact of both strikes and economic concentration ("monopoly") on freedom of the press.

A spate of insightful questions and points were raised in the ensuing discussion and at a coincidental meeting of council leaders with the Milwaukee Journal's principal editors. Some follow. In the interest of brevity they are offered without attribution—none necessarily speaks of either NNC or Journal policy.

Freedom of the press belongs to him who owns the press. The founding fathers assumed there would be many and, in fact, a century ago some cities had a dozen daily newspapers. The national peak was in 1909, when there were 2,600.

Today there are 1,768, although our population has more than doubled since 1909. In only four of the 27 cities with more than 500,000 population are there more than two local daily newspapers. Moreover, while population climbs, total circulation falls

Add to this trend strikes that stop or truncate newspapers and one can ask a familiar question: Is the diversity presumed by the constitutional protection for newspaper owners being undermined? A standard response is that economically strong papers do a better job than weak ones, so fewer means (or could mean) better.

Unfortunately, just when newspapers feel broadcasting competition most, soaring costs have forced a halt in news expansion, and often reduce it. The problem, in reality, may be "freedom of enterprise" rather than freedom of expression. For example, is a change in the tax laws a useful obective?

Could drastically lowered production costs revive something like the multiplicity of newspapers?

Or is the "economy of scale," which means a trend toward monopoly, the only feasible way to produce the kind of paper readers want?

And there's the rub!

Do enough people want to buy newspapers when they can get news free on radio and TV and what is "enough"?

By any usual standard, does broadcasting provide an adequate news and opinion menu? Journalists, broadcast and print, concede that newspapers do the superior job. Fine, but apparently a growing number of people, especially those reared on tube news, don't know that. Or don't care.

And, as a matter of fact, in this day of shrinking news holes and deadline-delivery problems, do newspapers truly provide that much more information, day in and day out? How much "in-depth" material is served up, how many people read what there is?

It is frightening how many young people read hardly anything by choice. Blame the schools. Blame TV. But there also seems to be a growing number of older people who no longer feel they need newspapers. Some, as in the case of busy doctors, feel they don't have time to read outside their professional journals. Is ostensible lack of time the only reason? Whatever, whoever, is to blame, what's the cure?

The scary question, for me at least, is whether improved newspapers would, in fact, attract increased circulations and advertising commensurate with the cost of improvement. If not, where's the incentive? Still I think people agree that cheapening the product in both monetary and journalistic terms would accelerate the decline, costing all of us far more in the long run.

cc: Mr. Wm. Arthur

Milwaukee Sentinel 11/13/75

Privacy Law Seen Barrier to News

By DAN PATRINOS
Sentinel Staff Writer

Racine, Wis. — State and federal privacy laws are making it increasingly difficult for journalists to gather information, the editor and publisher of a small town Massachusetts newspaper told a meeting of aspiring journalists and their teachers Wednesday.

Loren Ghiglione, of the Southbridge Evening News, said that "some of the fun that is disappearing from putting out my paper comes from the filching of the newspaper First Amendment rights."

Speaking at Wingspread, the Johnson Foundation conference center near here, Ghiglione added:

"I seem to be spending more and more time in our lawyer's office, trying to figure out ways to help our reporters extract information from unwilling sources, most of them clearly public sources."

Cites Examples

After citing several examples of his newspaper having had trouble getting access to information from government records, he said he did not believe in the "absolute notion" that everything that is true can and should be published.

"But I would err on the side of letting newspapers have the right to collect whatever information from whatever sources and publish what, in their best judgment, should be published. The public will be best served by that approach," he said.

Ghiglione said reporters may occasionally judge incorrectly, publishing something that with hindsight they would have deemed inappropriate for publication.

"But I agree with James Madison's view that 'some degree of abuse is inseparable from the proper use of anything, and in no instance is this more true than that of the press,' " Ghiglione said.

At the federal level, he said the 1974 Privacy Act that went into effect last September restricts access to an estimated 800 kinds of files kept by the federal government. He added that a proposed Fair Credit Reporting Act — House Bill 1984 — "would extend the (privacy) act to cover records of all levels of government, state and municipal as well as federal."

[A proposal establishing a right of privacy is pending in the Wisconsin Legislature.]

Not the Gospel

In a note of humor, Ghiglione warned his audience that as a journalist what he said should not be taken as gospel.

"You know what Mark Twain had to say about the intelligence of publishers. 'Take an idiot man from a lunatic asylum and marry him to an idiot woman, and the fourth generation of this connection should be a publisher.' "

The conference, attended Wednesday by about 30 persons, most of them university students, was convened by the National News Council.

bill bransted
the reader's advocate

11/20/75

THE NATIONAL NEWS COUNCIL is an organization with an admirable mission, its members are heavyweight thinkers and it has some substantial achievements to its credit. In other words, it is an important and respected part of the national news scene and it is a success. Well, yes and no.

Despite the attributes and trappings of high purpose, a forlorn air hovers over the enterprise. It is recognized by the news establishment, whatever that is, but not fully accepted. It is the poor relation that cannot be disowned but is not often invited to family parties. Its virtues are many but there really isn't much comfort in the thought that virtue is its own reward. Why not the occasional loud salute? There are reasons.

The council is a non-official body that went into business in August 1973 after a task force of the Twentieth Century Fund found a need for a group to monitor the fairness and accuracy of news reporting in this country.

However, there are more than 1700 daily newspapers in the United States and not many of them hailed the coming of the council. For the most part, newspaper publishers and editors are independent souls who do not relish advice from outsiders, particularly when it concerns newsroom operations.

THERE IS NOTHING PETTY, though, about the stand of an editor who resents and rejects any effort to control the news that appears in his paper. These people have strong feelings. They want to be responsible, they believe that they are and they have no intention of yielding even a hint of authority to a group that might be loaded with government agents.

This is the climate in which the National News Council was created and in which it exists. Council members are aware of the climate and they cope with it by accepting it and going about their business as best they can.

As a practical matter, most of their activities relate to complaints lodged against national news purveyors—The Associated Press, United Press International, the television networks, the news magazines and the news syndicates operated by such newspapers as the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Sun-Times, and a few others.

With matters in mind and holding some small reservations about the council, I was an intent observer when the council met for two days last week at Racine, Wis.

It was an impressive occasion. Ten of the council's 15 members were there and one of its five advisory members. Some of them technically are in retirement—the former chief judge of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York, the former editor of the Post-Dispatch editorial page—and some are actively pursuing careers—the vice president of a Miami radio station, the publisher of the National Review.

DESPITE WIDE DIFFERENCES in age, activities and, it seemed, in political philosophies, there was a total common interest in a free press, how it should be protected and how it should operate.

In the course of two days, I listened to thousands of words, many of them brilliant expositions of opposing views, and was astonished at how they came together in the end.

There were some abstractions but most of the matters under consideration dealt with specific issues that had been soundly documented. There was a diligent search for facts and an equally scrupulous search for words that would fairly describe a conclusion.

There was nothing desultory, certainly, when the complaint against the Globe-Democrat was considered. Even though the newspaper had chosen not to co-operate with the council's staff investigators, and was well within its rights in doing so, the staff people had accumulated a substantial amount of documentation.

They could do so because the Globe-Democrat was the source of articles circulated nationally by the Newhouse News Service and more than 50 articles dealing with the Mansion House controversy were on the record. Well acquainted with that record council members had no trouble in agreeing that the complaint against the newspaper was justified but it took time to reduce that agreement to words.

On the one hand the council is in favor of vigorous investigative reporting and it doesn't want to inhibit it. On the other hand there is the matter of press responsibility. The council found itself concerned with "out-of-context statements, failure to make appropriate attribution, oft-repeated half-truths and inferences, debatable issues handled in such a way as to appear settled, or at least that one side has little credibility."

The conclusion was a scorcher but it seemed to me that the case, and other grievances on the agenda, got honest consideration and the council arrived at hard but fair decision.

I'm a convert.

Report urges tougher questions for President

By I. William Hill

After four months of research, a study of the presidential press conference, commissioned by the National News Council, this week (November 17) recommended that—if the conference is to be more than "the President's plaything"—White House correspondents will have to prepare more thoroughly and develop a format for greater in-depth questioning.

The study was conducted by Professor Lewis Wolfson, of the American University's Department of Communication. It consisted of lengthy interviews with 20 veteran correspondents and also with authors of books on the media, a study of press conference transcripts beginning with the Eisenhower administration and an intensive monitoring of all President Ford's press conferences plus an analysis of their coverage in 12 metropolitan dailies.

Starting from the premise that "the press conference is no great fount of wisdom about the President," the report went on to state that, although the conference produces much news, it provides little insight. It is "still more cat and mouse than a press-government duel at high noon." One of three introductory quotations from correspondents was this one from Martin Nolan, *Boston Globe*: "It's just a bunch of reporters who happen to be thrown together. It's not the French house of deputies. It's more like the Marx Brothers."

Professor Wolfson ended his report with six recommendations that can be briefly summarized:

1. The President should be pressed to hold a news conference at least every two weeks, thus requiring him constantly to explain himself. Most conferences should be televised. Professor Wolfson found the regional press conference, so popular with President Ford, to be "mostly window dressing," a morale booster for the local press but carrying with it a decline in the quality of questioning.

2. The Washington press corps should prepare more thoroughly. Wolfson recommended reporters caucusing beforehand to discuss the truly important issues, previous administration answers, etc. He also suggested bringing in outside experts to propose questions.

3. The press should work out a format, preferably running longer than the present restrictive half hour, with an agreement to set out four or five areas for questioning, with possibly an open session to conclude the conference.

4. The White House should consider opening some internal deliberations to public view, along the line of the "government in the sunshine" laws now in force in many states as well as in both houses of Congress.

5. Press and citizen groups should seek a pledge from every candidate for President about holding regular press conferences and expanding freedom of information in government.

6. The press needs to build a knowledgable constituency to appeal to in a crisis. "They should talk frankly about shortcomings in President-press relations, on their own pages or on the air," the report said. "Educate the public more about the press conference so that the public will also feel cheated when they are not being held. Hire guest specialists to analyze each press conference. How skillful were the reporters? How forthcoming was the President? What questions weren't fully answered? What questions weren't even asked?"

As it is, Professor Wolfson pointed out, "White House aides often boast how easy it is for them to predict the questions that will be asked. James Hagerty, Eisenhower's press secretary, once estimated they guessed right on 90%. Jerry ter Horst said that in his brief stint as Ford's press secretary, he anticipated about 15 of every 20 questions.

While pointing out that television shortens the distance between the public and the President, the professor also pointed out that tv cuts down on barbed questioning. Few reporters want to "risk looking like a troublemaker to all America," the report said.

Wolfson recalled that President Kennedy likened preparing for a press conference to "preparing for a final exam twice a month." At the same time, Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, emphasized that the press conference forces issues onto the President's agenda. Nessen saw this as one of the great values of the press conference. "Before you can answer a question, you have to have a policy. Anticipating questions forces the White House to make decisions that might get delayed or not made (at all)."

The study of the transcripts proved one thing to Wolfson. The quality of the questioning, and the depth of the President's response, "rises sharply when reporters concentrate on particular issues. Their most effective probing of Ford's thinking has been on the Nixon pardon, his economic and energy programs, and the Rockefeller Commission report on the CIA."

The report went on: "On the other hand, the correspondents are least effective when they ask an indigestible hodgepodge of questions."

The Wolfson report reminded everyone that "Presidents can use the press conference (and the press) to give pep talks for their programs, float trial balloons on policy, or give a sneak preview of their travels abroad.

In the treasure hunt for information that is a day at the White House, Professor Wolfson's report pointed out that the journalist's most effective weapon is "asking tough questions in the right places."

Wolfson's report was largely based on interviews with Ben Bagdikian (media critic); David Broder (*Washington Post*); William Broom (Ridder Publications and president of the National Press Club); Adam Ckymer (*Baltimore Sun*); Frank Cormier (Associated Press); James Deakin (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*); Mel Elfin (*Newsweek*); Tom Jarrell (ABA News); Peter Lisagor (*Chicago Daily News*) Clark Mollenhoff (*Des Moines Register* and *Tribune*); Martin Nolan (Boston Globe); Alan Otten (*Wall Street Journal*); Dan Rather (CBS News); Bob Schieffer (CBS News); Martin Schram (*Newsday*); High Sidey (*Time*); William Small (director of CBS News); Godfrey Sperling, Jr. (*Christian Science Monitor*); William Theis (Hearst Newspapers); Helen Thomas (United Press International); Tom Wicker (*New York Times*); George Will (*National Review*); Jules Witcover (Washington Post); Ron Nessen; George Reedy (press secretary to President Johnson, now dean of Marquette College of Journalism); and Jerald F. ter Horst (*Detroit News*).

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Dow Jones to deliver Time in D. C.

Dow Jones & Company, Inc., parent of the *Wall Street Journal*, will begin direct delivery of *Time* magazine to subscribers in downtown Washington, D.C., on December 1, Time Inc. announced. Some 1,700 subscribers in the area between Dupont Circle and the White House will receive their copies on Monday mornings through the Dow Jones carrier organization.

The Washington program is the latest in a series of alternative modes of magazine delivery Time Inc. has initiated recently in the face of rising postal costs. Early last month direct delivery of Time magazine was started in parts of California, Kentucky and New Jersey. On November 22, as previously announced by the company, copies of Time will be delivered in the Boston suburbs of Wellesley, Natick and Sherborn. Newspaper carriers and, in California, a private deliverer are participating in the programs.

Study finds no real improvement in Presidents' news conferences

Journalism professor examines meetings with the press, finds them still manipulated by the White House, ill-used by grand-standing reporters

The presidential news conference may be thriving again after the dark days it endured during the Presidency of Richard Nixon, who never succeeded in hiding his distaste for meetings with the press. But, whether it is a 'good-hearted Ford or a buttoned-up Richard Nixon" who is involved, the news conference is the President's "plaything," producing "news" in the form of "presidential pronouncements that roll majestically onto the front pages—but not much insight." Nor does television help—at least in the effort to penetrate to the truth.

Those are the conclusions that Professor Lewis W. Wolfson, of American University's Department of Communication, reached in a study he conducted for The National News Council. Professor Wolfson, a former newspaperman himself—he headed the Providence Journal's Washington Bureau for six years, spent four months interviewing present and former presidential news secretaries, White House correspondents and observers of the presidential-media relationship, as well as reading transcripts of the presidential news conferences that have been held.

Professor Wolfson found that President Ford had made a number of moves to accommodate the media—permitting follow-up questions in news conferences, holding more news conferences and even taking them on the road, where he apportions the questions between local reporters and traveling White House correspondents.

And Professor Wolfson found, too, that news conferences are not easy for Presidents; they require considerable preparation. But, he says, the President controls them. Each of President Ford's moves to help the media, Professor Wolfson contends, "also reflects the power that even an obliging President has to shape press relations and, especially, the press conference itself."

"Above all, the President has television, with a power to command the networks," Professor Wolfson says. He calls television "the most important single development in press conferences since they began in the days of Woodrow Wilson."

What's more, television is not the only problem. Professor Wolfson says a review of presidential news conference transcripts reveals a considerable unevenness in the quality of question—and the President's responses. Reporters, he says, do better when they concentrate on specific issues—such as the President's pardon of former President Nixon or the Rockefeller Commission's report on the Central Intelligence Agency.

Professor Wolfson makes a number of suggestions for improving the media's performance in relation to the President. He says the media should press the President to hold a news conference at least once every two weeks, and that the public and the media should extract from presidential candidates a pledge to hold regular news conferences if elected. He also says presidential news conferences should be complemented by other exchanges with the President and White House officials.

But some of the recommendations involve a degree of cooperation among the White House reporters that most of them refuse to give. Professor Wolfson says the reporters should caucus before news conferences to prepare their questions, even to the point of inviting in outside experts to brief them and suggest questions.

However, as Professor Wolfson points out, White House reporters say the White House correspondents Association has only one main focus—organizing its annual dinner. When some White House reporters once attempted, in 1970, to deal with the problems posed by the dearth of presidential news conferences, many of their colleagues were, he notes, "aghast."